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ABSTRACT

Adult basic education (ABE) programs are not adequate to prepare the unemployed and undereducated to gain entry into the labor market and conceivably higher education. Some indications of the scope of the problem can be seen in a recent Division of Adult Education, U.S. Office of Education, report which indicated that more than fifty-one million adults do not have a high school diploma. We need more realistic remedial and vocational training programs for adults. We need comprehensive programs funded and supported by federal and state government. Many have suggested remedies for various weaknesses in the ABE approach. The following suggestions are offered to provide a more comprehensive training program than ABE affords for adults who need basic training for gainful employment: (1) establish community based training centers, (2) include a variety of occupational-vocational training programs, (3) provide job development, counseling, and placement services, (4) establish day care centers, and (5) initiate programs with definite goals and objectives. These suggestions point out the need for substantial federal allocations and a revision of the state approach to program sponsoring. (CSS)

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ADDITIONAL AND REALISTIC DIMENSIONS FOR ADULT BASIC EDUCATION - ABE FOR REAL?

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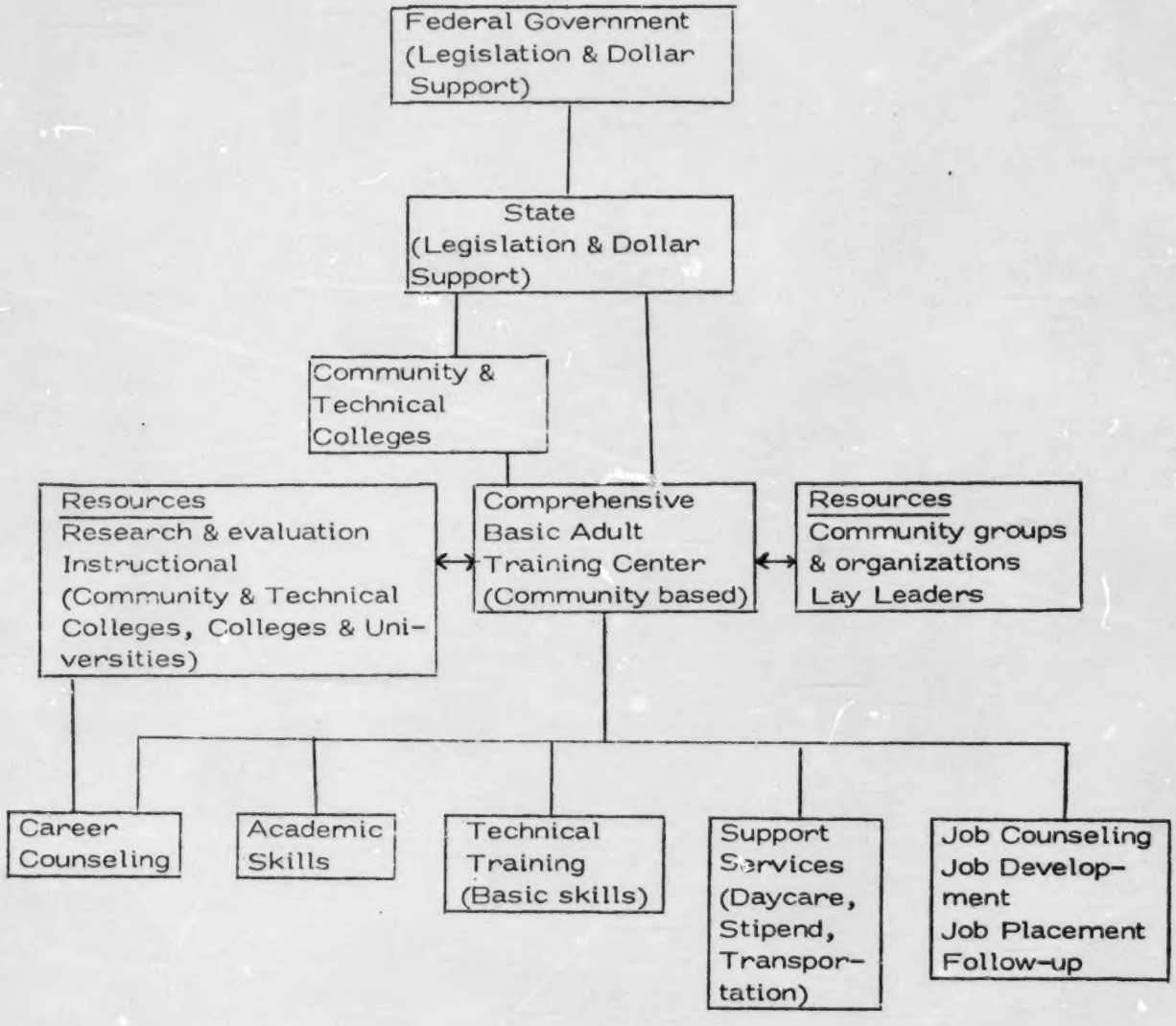
ADDITIONAL AND REALISTIC DIMENSIONS FOR ADULT BASIC EDUCATION - ABE FOR REAL?

Introduction

The central concern of this discussion is that Adult Basic Education* programs as they have been conducted over the past ten years are not adequate to prepare the unemployed and undereducated to gain entry into the labor market, and conceivably higher educational achievement. It will suggest that more federal support and a drastically different approach could conceivably achieve more satisfying results, providing long and short term benefits to both the individual and to society. The diagram on page two is reflective of the approach being advocated.

We have seen sufficient evidences to realize that any major socioeconomic problems require government assistance. For example, when flood, rain, or wind causes widespread damage to

*The term "adult basic education" means adult education for adults whose inability to speak, read, or write the English language constitutes a substantial impairment of their ability to get or retain employment commensurate with their real ability, which is designed to help eliminate such inability and raise the level of education of such individuals with a view to making them less likely to become dependent on others, to improving their ability to benefit from occupational training and otherwise increasing their opportunities for more productive and profitable employment, and to making them better able to meet their adult responsibilities. Adult Education Act, Public Law 91 - 230, and all of its amendments through October 12, 1976. (20 U.S.C. 1201 - 1211b).



Diagramatic Schema for Comprehensive Community-Based Adult Basic Training Center

property, government quickly declares the area(s) affected "federal disaster areas". This action is necessary in order to provide funds to help those who need to rebuild, repair damages; chances are they could become a burden to society if they were unable to receive assistance and continue to be productive citizens.

Widespread poverty, unemployment, and undereducation are major social problems. They too require substantial support from government in order to be eradicated. They are not problems which most people are capable of solving by themselves. They need government assistance. Malcolm Knowles (1) [Right to Read] underscores this point by observing that our failure to remove this blemish is an injury to our nation's self-respect. The implications are far deeper and broader than mere inability to read, notwithstanding the significance of reading.

A recent report from the Division of Adult Education, U.S. Office of Education indicated that there are more than 51 million adults in this country who did not have a high school diploma and of this 51 million, 15 million had less than eight years of schooling. These figures cannot be taken at face value because conceiveably many have acquired skills through years of on-the-job experience. However, they clearly suggest the need for an all out effort to improve

the educational status of those who desire to improve themselves, especially since a high school diploma is the basic requirement for employment and additional education.

At this juncture, (after ten years of experience) we need additional and more realistic dimensions to academic remedial programs and basic vocational skills training programs for adults. We need a new infusion of vigor and vitality to promote human resource development. We need a comprehensive program funded and supported by the federal and state governments. We need a whole new stratagem for action -- with lay people (the poor) and bureaucrats working together -- using the lessons of the past (especially those of the 1960's). We need a new philosophy for ABE.

The significance of support from the national government is underscored by Commager (2) who noted that it was the federal government who for almost 150 years had made efforts to eliminate slavery, gave blacks the vote, guaranteed them civil and political rights, gave sufferage to women, provided labor with the "Bill of Rights", and supported a host of other welfare and educational bills.

Education For The World Of Work

The Founding Fathers of America, in spite of their divergent

backgrounds seem to have agreed on two basic beliefs, namely the dignity of the individual, and the freedom of each individual to earn a livelihood in that individual's area of choice. Education for the world of work was a conscious effort in the formative period of this country. It is reasonable to suggest that our society was built on the work ethic principle.

There are millions of adult Americans who are not habitual workers because they are not equipped to obtain or hold a steady job. The two basic factors which have often been cited as contributing to their plight, are inadequate educational preparation, and lack of motivation. For these the attendant consequences are social and economic depression. Other disturbing effects are family dislocation, inability to undertake social and civic responsibilities, psychological depression, crime and delinquency. Added to these is the spiralling increased burden on the average working taxpayer, in order to support these individuals either on welfare or in penal institutions.

On August 20, 1966, J. Kenneth Little (3) delivered a speech to the day school staff at the Madison Area Technical College. His theme was, "Does Education For Work, Work?" Little elaborated on his theme by observing that one of the problems confronting

education was the need for changing the quality of educational experience, greater involvement of students in shaping their learning experiences and extending the range and types of learning activities, both in and outside the classroom, redefining the role and qualifications of teachers, and placing new values upon preparation for work as a primary outcome of the educational process for all students at all levels of the educational system. Within the context of this discussion, Little's observation offers the challenge for exploring new dimensions in adult and continuing education in general, and ABE in particular.

A New Philosophy Is Needed

"A philosophy of education is any reasonable coherent set of values and fundamental assumptions used as a basis for evaluating and guiding educational practices." So said Philip H. Phenix (4). For purposes of this discussion, I endorse this viewpoint.

In discussing the vocational aspects of education, Dewey (5) noted that occupation is a concrete term for continuity, that it includes the development of artistic capacity of any kind, of special scientific ability, of effective citizenship, as well as professional and business occupation, to say nothing of mechanical labor or engagement in gainful persuits. This observation augers well for

the promotion of basic occupational skills for the type of clientele who also needs basic academic upgrading. It has both short and long term implications for economic viability and citizenship responsibility. Advocacy for a new philosophy for those adults who are functionally illiterate, rest in part on acceptance of the philosophy of 'Reconstructionism' which suggest that man is a goal-seeking animal and that these goals can be delineated with the aid of the human sciences, such as anthropology, sociology, and psychology.

In the United States, there is constant agitation for jobs and job-training programs for the poor, especially blacks and other minority groups residing in the central cities. Are these demands unreasonable when wealth and affluence "on the other side of the fence" serve as daily reminders of poverty and misery? Is the cause of poverty laziness or inability to produce due to lack of basic training? Should able-bodied men and women be supported by welfare or should they be trained for gainful employment? Who is really the big, lazy "Buck"? Is basic academic upgrading (as we now know Adult Basic Education) sufficient, of itself, and by itself to promote employment and motivation for adults; many with family responsibilities? The quest for the good life is deeply entangled with motivation, a high degree of self-confidence, based primarily on a combination of either

purely academic achievements or a combination of academic and vocational. They provide the catalyst for man's further adventure into the field of knowledge.

The need to promote meaningful work programs is reflected in the following philosophical statement:

1. In a democratic society every citizen should be provided the opportunity to develop his/her potential to the fullest extent possible.
2. Human beings are educable persons and human growth and development is a distinct possibility when the opportunity is available.
3. The preservation of society is dependent on the extent to which adults are prepared to understand all of its ramifications and to be able to make provisions for continued growth and improvement.
4. Poverty and illiteracy are the two essentials for both social and human stagnation and decay. The escape route from this area of human stagnation, is literacy, and training for the world of work - in order that man, as an individual, may "find himself" and be able to "lose himself" into interest and ideas larger and more enduring.

5. For adults, learning exercises are more likely to become meaningful to the extent that those exercises relate to priority needs for achievement, recognition, and self-fulfillment.

Elements Of Current Weaknesses In ABE Programs

Several investigations have pointed to a number of weaknesses affecting Adult Basic Education programs. A number of suggestions have been advanced. Suggestions offered by Thompson and Jensen (6) for community based educational counseling for adults are quite in order, but would be more meaningful if incorporated into a comprehensive training program. Others have called for strengthening community linkages. Beder and Smith (7) recently conducted an investigation of Adult Basic Education in New York and surrounding areas. In reporting on supportive services, they noted that job placement or training were crucial forms of basic education. They also stressed the importance of day care, transportation, and stipend. It is their opinion that if a program could provide these supportive services, it would be more effective. This observation underscores the suggestion that a program should be comprehensive in nature, that facilities and funds should be made available for those

services considered vital and/or indispensable for establishing realistic objectives and evaluating results.

Beder and Smith suggest that community interagency linkage be established in order to secure additional funds. I suggest that the whole philosophy, concept, and legislation be overhauled and revised in order to provide adequate support from the national and state governments. An observation regarding stipend, made by one program director helps to explain some of the problems ABE programs have faced and are still experiencing. It runs in part:

> The students the Employment Service sent us were still without stipend. I said, "When you send them to The Manpower Center, they get paid. When they come to us, they can't get paid".

The question of stipends and adequate funds is only one example of the many problems plaguing Adult Basic Education programs. Another noticeable factor is that all too often classes are held in church basements, run-down houses, and other unsuitable places. The questions therefore arise: Are ABE programs the unwanted step-child of our educational enterprise - the established traditional institutions, if not, are our decision makers really sincere, but lack sensitivity regarding the real needs of adults who need basic training

for productivity? Another main weakness of current program practices is that the emphasis is mainly on operational procedure which inherently de-emphasizes research and/or systematic evaluation. This makes it difficult, if not impossible to examine the partial effects of program output.

Suggested Approach And Program Content

The following suggestions are viewed as forming a more comprehensive training program for adults who need basic training in order to be gainfully employed.

1. Community based training centers - these should be established in close proximity to major population centers in the central cities. They should be closely linked with the nearest technical or community college. They should be visable and recognized, designed as permanent educational training centers.
2. Program content - every effort should be made to include a variety of occupational-vocational training programs. These should be conducted conjointly with academic remedial programs and physical isolation between one component and the other should be minimized to the fullest extent possible.

3. Job development, job counseling, and job placement - job development in this sense means close working relationship with business and industry in order to: a) determine job availability, b) exploring the possibilities of "creating" positions. Job counseling means providing the clientele with pertinent information relative to various kinds of jobs - in particular firms or companies. Job placement means assistance in finding a job with a particular firm and coordination with personnel in said firms in order to provide needed assistance, encourage additional training if necessary and encourage promotion.
4. Day care centers - efforts should be made to establish day care centers as adjuncts to a training center or in close proximity to a training center. This has the potential of a) reducing cost, b) providing mothers with the opportunity to assist in the care of their own children, c) providing those in charge to get firsthand assistance from mothers.
5. Programs should be established with clearly defined goals and objectives. Objectives (long and short term) should be prioritized taking into consideration quantity,

quality, time, and cost. The development of goals and objectives should provide an opportunity for clientele in participation in curriculum development, and other important elements of the program.

These suggestions called for two imperatives namely: a) the need for substantial additional federal allocation, b) the need for a revision in the states approach to program sponsoring. Revision at the federal level should call for new goals and objectives in addition to dollar allocation. Revision at the state level should largely reflect programmatic approach and the type of personnel involved in decision making.

Perhaps the question of discarding the acronym ABE is also expedient. However, it seems a reasonable conjecture that this question will get lost in the effort to establish a "comprehensive" community based training center even with ABE per se, as a component. In any case the main focus should be on program content and output.

Summary

The decade of the 1960's could very well be viewed as the beginning of a new national concern for the need to upgrade the level

of competence of millions of adult citizens who received little or no schooling during their youth. Adult educators, representatives of business and industry and those closely associated with vocational training programs began to voice concern over the need for Adult Education programs. For example, around 1960, a distinguished group of adult educators (The Commission of Professors of Adult Education) assembled to review the need for additional emphasis on adult education. They declared adult education "a new imperative for our times" and further noted that there was a new emphasis on education for adults in America, largely because of the rapid development of science and technology and the concomitant effects of the need for retraining and upgrading in order to insure optimum productivity.

The task of developing a working mechanism between local community based organizations on the one hand, and established educational institutions and state agencies on the other hand is one of the inherent challenges in the approach suggested. At this point in time, many adult educators and program coordinators who are concerned with upgrading adults of low basic educational levels are also interested in bringing them into the mainstream of American society from which they have been excluded all their lives. There

is, however, a growing awareness on their part that in order to accomplish this these aduits of working age must be trained to the extent that they can obtain stable employment and become economically viable. In short, be transformed from tax recipients into taxpayers.

When industries allocate money for improvement, they do so in the hope of making a profit and they usually do. In principle the same holds true for allocation for educational improvement. The more people are educated, the more they improve their occupational skills, the greater the likelihood of their increasing their earning power, as well as contribute to the well-being of the community, state and nation. Investment for educational improvement is tantamount to investment in people and economic growth. Probably no other investment is more significant.

FOOTNOTES

1. Knowles, Malcolm, "Right to Read", Reading Mart, Printed by the National Association for Public Continuing & Adult Education, 1976.

2. Commager, Henry S., Vocational & Career Education Concepts and Operations, Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Pub. Co., Inc., 1976, p.32.

3. Little, Kenneth J., Does Education For Work, Work? (Speech to day school staff at the Madison Area Technical College, 1966).

4. Phenix, Philip H., Philosophies of Education, New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1961, p.4.

5. Dewey, John, Vocational and Career Education Concepts and Operations, Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Pub. Co., Inc., 1976, p.61.

6. Thompson, Carmen and David Jensen, Community-based Educational Counseling For Adults, Produced by University of Wisconsin-Extension, 1975.

7. Beder, Harold and Franceska Smith, Developing An Adult Education Program Through Community Linkages, Printed by the AEA of the U.S.A., 1977.

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